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Forgiveness: A Vital Skill to Cope with Employment Issues

Forgiveness is a topic most people probably associate with personal values, spirituality, or religiosity. It may even be considered in relation to living a healthier lifestyle but not in relation to employment concerns or injustices. Despite, its traditional associations and the perspectives most commonly held, forgiveness is a value, a practice, and a way of life that benefits to person who practices it more than the person who committed the offense, hurt, or perceived wrongdoing. Forgiveness is also a skill and a process which can be learned or taught and has value in regards to employment issues and concerns.

Since the mid 1990's, forgiveness has captured the attention of psychologists, counselors, and helping professionals, particularly in regards to the ways it can improve peoples' lives when dealing with hurts or offenses committed by another. Forgiveness studies and interventions have taken place across numerous populations (i.e., spinal cord injury, cardiac or heart conditions, traumatic brain injury, elderly individuals, fibromyalgia in combination with abusive relationships, and other people severely hurt or offended by the decisions and actions of others). Throughout the research, forgiveness has been associated with reduced amounts of anger, anxiety, and depression; lessened blood pressure and negative health effects; and increased hope, positive attitude and outlook, self-esteem, and adjustment to disability. The amount of research occurring which supports the use and practice of forgiveness continues to grow and promote that it is a healthy and life-giving skill to have and to practice as a part of a person's daily living.

At this junction, people may wonder how forgiveness relates to employment; a viable question indeed. Finding, maintaining, and advancing in the employment sector is not an easy task. Throughout the process of locating employment or of trying to further one's career, people may have encountered people or situations, perhaps even bosses or managers, who have made decisions or behaved in ways that drastically and negatively affect the lives of its employees. For instance, in recent years, many of us can probably relate to the experience of corporate downsizing, employee layoffs, or budget cuts. Others may have been challenged in finding a suitable job, one that provides adequate pay and health benefits. Some may have had to settle for part-time work, underemployment, or piecing together two or three jobs just to make ends meet. Even more dismal is the experience of being laid off or unemployed and being challenged in the ability to pay one's bills or mortgage. The possibilities are endless.

Compounding these experiences are the times people may have been denied a job for unknown reasons, perhaps discriminated against due to perceived ideas (i.e., age, disability, gender), or have experienced some other hurtful and negative slight or injustice pertaining to employment. When such issues occur, and deep hurt has occurred, moving forward is sometimes difficult especially if the committed offense was deliberate, intentional, and morally wrong.

For some, the practice of forgiveness is about being ready "to let the pain go" or to open the door for something better. While it never feels good to be denied a job or access to something we desire, it is important that we consider the fact that something better may 'await us' around the corner. Not getting what we want, in one instance, does not mean there is not a better option ahead; we just have not discovered it, yet. Further, the more we hang onto the negativity as a part of experienced or perceived injustice, the more we hurt ourselves emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically. Moreover, when people hold onto the pain for long periods of time, the internal negativity may impact their relationships with themselves and others as well as promote continued discomfort and in the end, who wants that? Finally, as mentioned

previously, forgiveness may take time but it is amenable and something that changes; forgiveness can occur on a continuum and is a process which unfolds as people are ready to explore and face the inner wounds that lie below the surface. As people move forward in this process, they start to experience the many positive benefits it holds for the person who forgives. People begin to see themselves, their world and list of options (i.e., employment directions), and even the offending person or party in a different way. Somehow, doors begin to open to pathways that forge new possibilities and typically better ones than we originally believed could happen.

Forgiveness is a topic Dr. Susan Stuntzner, Assistant Professor of the Rehabilitation Counseling and Human Services program, is well-versed in as this is an area she teaches students about as a part of the RCHS curriculum in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho at the UI Harbor Center. Additionally, she has conducted research on forgiveness as it relates to persons with disabilities. She has published articles on forgiveness and disability and has written books (i.e., *Living with a Disability: Finding Peace Amidst the Storm*, *Reflections from the Past: Life Lessons for Better Living*, *Resiliency and Coping with Disability: The Family After*) which discuss and explore the importance of forgiveness as a coping skill when living with a disability. Additional information about her works and publications can be found at her website: www.therapeutic-healing-disability.com. People may also reach her by phone: (208) 292-1409 or via email: stuntzner@uidaho.edu